

Longevity of Railroad Retirement Beneficiaries

Every three years, the Railroad Retirement Board's Chief Actuary conducts a study of the longevity of its annuitants, as part of a valuation of future revenues and future benefit payments. The following questions and answers summarize the results of the most recent longevity study.

1. What were the study's finding on the life expectancy of retired male railroaders?

Using data through 1995, the study indicated that, on the average, a male railroader retiring at age 65 can be expected to live another 15.5 years. Studies done three, six, and nine years ago indicated life expectancies of 15.2, 14.8 and 14.7 years, respectively, for this category of beneficiary, so the most recent data reflected a continued improvement in longevity.

2. How did these life expectancy figures compare to those of disabled annuitants?

As would be expected, disabled annuitants have a shorter average life expectancy, but the difference decreases with age. At age 60, a disabled railroader has an average life expectancy of 14.3 years, or 5.2 years less than a nondisabled male annuitant of the same age; at age 65, a disabled annuitant has an average life expectancy of 3.7 years less than a nondisabled 65 year-old annuitant; and at age 70 the difference is only 2.6 years.

3. Are women still living longer than men?

In general, women still live longer than men. This is shown both in the Board's life expectancy studies of male and female annuitants and by other studies of the general United States population.

For example, at age 65 a retired female railroader is expected on the average to live 19.6 years, 4.1 years longer than a retired male railroader the same age, and spouses and widows age 65 have an average life expectancy of 20.2 years and 18.5 years, respectively.

4. Can individuals use life expectancy figures to predict how long they will live?

Life expectancy figures are averages for large groups of people. Any particular individual's lifetime may be much longer or shorter than the life expectancy of his or her age and group.

According to the study, from a group of 1,000 retired male employees at age 65, 889 will live at least 5 years, 726 at least 10 years, 518 at least 15 years, and 305 at least 20 years. Of female age annuitants at age 65, 510 will be alive 20 years later.

5. How do the life expectancies of railroad retirement annuitants compare with those of the general population?

While exact data were not available for direct comparison, data available to the Railroad Retirement Board did not indicate significant differences.

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